

THE INDEPENDENT

May 24, 2003

All-mail voting is a big success in Oregon and would save money here

Since Oregon experimented with voting by mail six years ago, we have become believers in the process. For one thing, it saves money, especially now that the ballots in this county must be printed in three languages. For another, it means more people will vote in elections.

In 2000, after the mail elections worked so flawlessly, Oregon did away with precinct voting. No more precinct workers being paid by the county, no more precincts open during Election Day, and the convenience of marking the ballot and mailing it in makes this process much more conducive to the 21st century.

In California today, about 25 percent of all voters use absentee ballots, most sent through the mail. In Washington, nearly half of all voters cast their ballots by mail.

Warren Slocum, who heads the county Elections Office, is a believer in mailed elections because of the tremendous costs borne by the county. In

June, there will be only one issue on the ballot in San Carlos, Burlingame and Foster City-San Mateo, a school parcel tax for each city. In Belmont there is one council seat up for a special two-year election.

A state Assembly bill by Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, would approve all mail elections in cities under 100,000 population. It is conservatively estimated that a mail election would cut the cost by more than half for every voter in San Mateo County, from \$5.44 per voter to \$2.

It is impossible to tell at this point what the costs will be for each of those cities, but the preliminary costs will probably exceed \$40,000 in San Carlos, Burlingame and Belmont. In Foster City-San

Mateo, because of the size of the electorate, the costs will approach \$100,000.

A state Assembly bill by Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, would approve all mail elections in cities under 100,000 population. It is conservatively estimated that a mail election would cut the cost by more than half for every voter in San Mateo County, from \$5.44 per voter to \$2.

The savings from Simitian's bill would save about \$300,000 for a general election in the county. The county spent almost \$1 million on its first trilingual ballot last year when the federal law was triggered by minority voter population in the county for the first time.

Some in Sacramento, especially former secretary of state Bill Jones, always maintained that mail voting would lead to potential fraud. But that has not been the case in either Oregon or Washington where the mail process has been squeaky clean — as opposed to voting machines in Florida.

Redwood City
Menlo Park



The Examiner

Since 1880

September 24, 2003

Examiner View

Simitian's bill allows all-mail special elections

ASSEMBLYMAN JOE SIMITIAN'S BILL allowing cities to hold vote-by-mail special elections did not take place in a vacuum. Former Belmont councilmember Adele Della Santina passed the idea on to us and we wrote an editorial as the Belmont City Council was deciding between a special election or an appointment to fill the council vacancy caused by Terri Cook's election as city clerk.

The editorial criticized the cost of a special election in Belmont, estimated at close to \$40,000.

When the council could not agree on a candidate to appoint to fill the vacancy, they chose to hold a special June election.

Belmont Councilmember Dave Warden brought the matter before the City Council, which then directed city staff to contact local legislators about introducing legislation allowing special mail elections.

Assistant City Manager Dan Rich contacted Assemblyman Simitian, who introduced legislation after reading The Independent's editorial comments on the issue.

However, the legislation could not be passed in time for the election.

Simitian's initial bill did not include cities with more than 10,000 population, which excluded Belmont. On April 2, 2002, the city of Belmont wrote a letter asking Simitian to increase the population limit in his bill and he did — to any city under 100,000 population.

Throughout the legislative process, Simitian was in contact with Belmont officials regarding opposition arguments to the bill.

Simitian said the mail elections would eliminate costly special elections and remove reasons for filling council vacancies with appointments.

He believes it is better for democracy if voters are able to select councilmembers rather than have them selected by the council.

A special election, held without any other measure or candidates on the ballot, costs \$5.44 per voter compared to \$2 in an all-mail election.

David Tom, election supervisor for San Mateo County, said the legislation would reduce the costs of special elections by 40 percent.

We are very impressed with Simitian's knowledge of local issues and his enthusiastic response to local problems. His decision to write legislation even before he is asked to do so is an impressive part of his Assembly record.